



## Simmons SDS8 Electronic Drumkit

Dave Simmons revolutionized the drumming world with the creation of the Simmons *SDS5* electronic drums a few years ago, and the new hi-tech *SDS7* introduced this year. Realizing that the cost of the *SDS7* may be prohibitive for some, Simmons has recently released the "budget" *SDS8* electronic kit.

The Simmons *SDS8* is a five-piece set utilizing analog sounds like the *SDS5* did. The pads have retained their hexagonal shape, but have had their playing surfaces redesigned. The *SDS8* pads have new thin rubber surfaces with rubber edging, which are a lot more comfortable to play than the previous riot-shield material, thus decreasing the "bone-shock" problem that many drummers have complained about. For better playing response, the wood underneath the rubber surface has been made thinner. Now, playing the Simmons pads is a lot closer to playing on practice pads than on tabletops! (Note to *SDS5* owners: The new rubber surfaces will retrofit *SDS5* pads.) The shell material is plastic, and seems to be softer than the *SDS5* shells. (See *MD*: Nov. '81 for *SDS5* review.) Five different colors are available.

The pads also utilize new internal mounting brackets. These round, split receivers are hidden, and use a T-screw at the pad's bottom to open or close the inner clamp around the holder arm. Simmons' new mount will accept many of the current tube-armed holders, and also has the capability to interface with memory locks.

The bass drum pad measures approximately 22" high, and has large, spike-ended tubes, which are bent at their tops. These spur tubes fit into receivers near the top of the pad, and like the other pads, are locked in with a T-screw. The spurs also have memory locks fitted on. At the bottom of the pad is an aluminum piece for pedal mounting. Most pedals fit comfortably on the plate, but I did have a problem

with the full-sprocket DW 5000CX. Without the support plate, it was fine, but with it, the pad was kicked up at a strange angle when I tried to secure the pedal to the pad. I would also recommend that Simmons gives the plate a little more depth, since the full sprocket of the pedal sometimes rubs against the pad.

The feel of the bass drum pad is a bit alien at first, since it doesn't "give," but I quickly got used to it (Gust like playing a practice pad). It's advisable to use a felt beater—a wooden one makes too much noise against the pad surface.

The four other pads in the kit are all the same size—approximately 14". Their connector jacks are right next to the mounting receiver. Since the pads themselves do not contain the electronics to create sounds, one need not worry about which pad is used where in the setup.

Simmons has created an entirely new control board for the *SDS8*. The brain resembles a club-type mixer, and has a metal casing and a rocker power switch. Whereas the *SDS5* had plug-in modules with three preset sounds and one real-time user-controlled sound each, the *SDS8* has five separate channels, each with two sounds: one factory preset, and one that can be player-programmed by using the control dials on the unit. These sounds are selectable via a pushbutton at each channel. The kit sounds can be converted all at once from "factory" to "player," and vice versa, either by using the master select button on the board or by a foot switch. An LED at each channel indicates which setting is in use, and a separate trigger LED flashes when each particular pad is hit.

Since this is a five-piece kit, the channels are: bass, snare, hi, mid and low toms. Each channel has its own parameters. (A tom-tom channel cannot become a second bass drum channel.) There are nine controls at each channel which are to be used by the player when setting up custom sounds: sensitivity, filter (overall brightness), pitch, bend (up or down), decay, noise/tone balance, impact click, left-to-right pan (for stereo image setup), and volume. The board also has master left and right volumes, as well as a master mix volume. The rear of the board has all 1/4" jacks (as do the pads). Jacks are available for separate pad outputs and inputs, sequencer input for interface with the

*SDS6* Sequencer, foot pedal input, mono mix output, and stereo outputs. There is no headphone jack, but amplified headphones will work when connected to the mix output. Effects such as flanging, phasing, echo, etc., may easily be added in, and the separate pad outputs are very handy for individual EQ of each channel.

The factory presets produce the "classic" Simmons sound. Using the controls on the board allows you to program up a second drumkit worth of sounds and, at your option, use them in conjunction with, or in place of, the factory sounds. It should be noted that using the controls on the board does not affect the sounds of the presets at all.

All preset sounds are quite good. In fact, I liked the presets here better than the ones on the *SDS5*. I was able to dial in some of my own sounds very easily, but found that you should write down settings you like, since the board has no memory capability for user sounds, and it's quite possible that the dials can turn a bit when the unit is in transit.

As I stated before, response of the pads is like playing a practice pad kit. The pads have an amazing sensitivity range, which can be set by the player on either of the sounds. For example, a soft roll on the floor tom can create a timpani-like sound. Increasing pressure gets you up to the full floor tom sound. One great thing about the electronic kits is that you do not need to hit them hard to achieve a good sound; the electronics do the work. Even though the pads are edged off, they are not capable of rimshot sounds. It is possible to play the pads on their edging—a good way to get double-bass patterns from the single-bass drumpad! The rubber pads will mark up, but they will not dent, and the marks can be removed with a damp cloth.

Stands are now included with the *SDS8*, as are all cables connected to the pads. Separate snare stands can also work well to hold individual pads. Besides being a good live or studio kit (since there is absolutely no leakage), the *SDS8* can also serve as a silent practice kit, or an audible practice kit when hooked into a home stereo system. The kit is extremely compact—the pads, brain, and any hardware you choose to use will pack into a floor tom case and a trap case.

The only two criticisms I have for the

by Bob Saydlowski, Jr.

SDS8 are the lack of optional XLR (three-pin) jacks at the signal outputs, and the need for a longer foot-switch cable. If the brain is set up on your right, and you want the foot switch to be on the left of your hi-hat, the chord will not reach over. Many drummers have wanted only one or two pads to use as an addition to their acoustic kit, and Simmons plans to release the SDS1, a single, battery-operated pad with an interchangeable sound source.

The Simmons SDS8 is a remarkable unit. It allows two different electronic drumkits to be immediately at your disposal and, at a retail of \$1,550, is placed in the dollar range of most *acoustic* five-piece drumkits. The Simmons kits were first thought to be a passing fad, but it is very clear that they are now a major part of contemporary music, and the introduction of the SDS8 kit makes it possible for everyone to enjoy the sounds.



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